

Community Vision for HP16

The Market Town Health Check Report for Great Missenden, Prestwood and the surrounding villages SPRING 2009

Your community • Your future

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1 Introduction

1.1 What is the Community Vision for HP16?

In the summer of 2005 a group of people from Great Missenden, Prestwood and the surrounding villages came together to start a community project – the Community Vision for HP16. These people were residents with a strong belief in the potential of their neighbourhood. Their aim was to understand the feelings of local people about their locality by gathering detailed research data about it. Then they used this information to develop some plans that could potentially make a difference for the future of the area.

We use the term ‘HP16’ to describe the survey neighbourhood because ours is a collection of villages and hamlets within the HP16 postcode area. There are too many of them to include the name of each settlement in a brief project title. The focal points of the area and the main centres of population are the villages of Great Missenden and Prestwood.

The Community Vision for HP16 (CV4HP16) followed the government-funded ‘Market Town Health Check’ format. A Market Town Health Check is designed to help people to appraise the strengths, weaknesses, future demands and opportunities facing their communities. It focuses on particular aspects of local life – the economy, environment, community, transport and communication. A Health Check aims to establish an increased role for rural towns and villages, revitalising them and enabling their futures to be shaped by the people who live, work and play in and around them. This approach has been recognised for its role in over 200 communities nationally. It has drawn together disparate groups and helped to foster a sense of local identity.



A meeting to discuss The Source newspaper at the Library



Local people defining their area by ‘beating the bounds’

CV4HP16 initially used questionnaires and street surveys to ask people’s views and generated hundreds of diverse responses. A group of some seventy volunteers then gathered background data about the HP16 area – population, economics, services and infrastructure. In the autumn of 2007 a steering group collated the two sets of information to produce an ‘Emerging Vision’ leaflet. This was delivered to everyone in Great Missenden, Prestwood and the surrounding area, asking for feedback and ideas. These ideas shaped a second publication, the ‘Plan for Action’ leaflet. The plan was launched at a public event in the autumn of 2008 and promoted widely. The steering group combined information and feedback from these surveys, research, events and publications into this document to represent a realistic, evidence-based, community-driven set of plans and project concepts. Any community group in the area can use these as background evidence if they plan to tackle projects such as those outlined here.

Due to the length of the CV4HP16 project a number of issues that were raised by local people in the early stages of the consultation process have now been addressed. For example, local schools now have travel plans in place that have alleviated some traffic and parking issues, although this remains a wider issue in need of a solution. There is a new bus service linking Great Missenden with Aylesbury and Hemel Hempstead, meaning that buses now serve a large proportion of the area’s population, although several villages are still without any service. At the time of producing this document, significant challenges exist in the wider economic climate. We have lost amenities including the village pub in Ballinger but we have also seen new businesses open, including a delicatessen and an alternative energy company in Great Missenden and an organic butcher in Prestwood. The local bakery-cum-cafe has even started to bake fresh bread again! Other community projects have run in parallel to CV4HP16 over the duration of the project and the steering group has aimed to keep the projects aligned in terms of aims and outcomes. Significantly, we now have our own periodical community newspaper as a direct result of CV4HP16, reflecting the project’s communication theme.

1.2 About our neighbourhood



Finger post in Great Missenden

We are located at the heart of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and have the largest settlements within its boundaries. The HP16 area is situated between the Buckinghamshire towns of High Wycombe to the south-west, Aylesbury to the north, Chesham in the east and Amersham in the south-east. It is transected by the A413 and A4128 trunk roads and the Chiltern railway provides a connection with all stations to London Marylebone and Aylesbury.

More than ten thousand years of farming and development have shaped our landscape since people first settled here in Neolithic times. Iron Age tools have been found everywhere across the area from Potter Row to Prestwood. There are the remains of a mediaeval farmstead in Angling Spring woods and a castle on Frith Hill. Trees from the once abundant Prestwood cherry and apple orchards are still in evidence and beech woods proliferate, where bodgers once worked to supply High Wycombe at the height of its furniture industry. The 12th century saw the first Abbey in Great Missenden but, after Henry VIII ordered the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the building became an elegant house with landscaped grounds. There are over fifty other listed buildings in the local Conservation Area, some dating back to the Middle Ages, and another fifty across the HP16 area itself. One of the most famous monuments in the area commemorates John Hampden – ‘The Patriot’ – and his pivotal role in the English Civil War.

The HP16 area has a total population well in excess of 10,000 people; the actual number is difficult to assess accurately from public records because our settlements span several electoral ward boundaries. The area is largely affluent with above average incomes and house prices. It has its own socio-economic issues, though, including pockets of relative deprivation and an average population age greater than the national average.

Great Missenden village, which lies on the upper reaches of the River Misbourne, is the local centre. It provides a comprehensive range of facilities, including doctor and dentist surgeries, banks, a post office, library, supermarket and a variety of shops and businesses. The local schools – from junior to upper – all have good reputations, excellent OFSTED reports and wide catchment areas. The award-winning Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre and Missenden Abbey, with its Management Centre and Adult Education Centre, have national reputations.

The hillside villages and hamlets sit either side of the Misbourne valley. They are surrounded by farms and woodland and linked by a network of paths that connect with regional long distance walks and cycling routes. When the railway arrived in the late 1800s these scattered settlements grew into distinct villages. After the Second World War Prestwood was substantially enlarged. It is now larger than Great Missenden, with its own range of shops and amenities.



The Hampden Monument

2 Findings

Through our consultation exercises, data research and questionnaires, our combined efforts identified the following key themes for our area:

- Conservation of the natural environment;
- High Street regeneration;
- The local economy;
- Litter and recycling services;
- Sympathetic and affordable development;
- Traffic and parking;
- A sense of community;
- Enhancement of social services;
- Community and recreational facilities;
- The needs of young people;
- Attracting visitors;
- Availability of local information.



Gaining an overall view

In keeping with the separate foci of the CV4HP16 project, these themes are further expanded in the following sections. The table below shows examples of some of the most frequent responses to our questionnaire that underpin these themes. The complete survey findings are included in the appendices to this document.

Most frequently occurring CV4HP16 survey responses		
Likes	Dislikes	Other comments
Rural environment &	Parking-related issues	Need for improved public transport
Availability of all essential amenities	Traffic-related issues	Need for better range of niche shops
Good rail & road transport links	Demise of useful shops	Young people need facilities & events

2.1 Environment

Local people in our survey expressed the greatest strength of feeling about the local environment so we have given this significant emphasis. Being the largest area of settlement within the boundaries of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty makes our area one of national significance. Residents and visitors value the magnificent scenery, tranquil woodlands and the accessibility of the countryside for walking, riding and cycling. The historic character of Great Missenden High Street is recognised as a key asset but we should provide better information about our ancient buildings and features to enable people to appreciate them and in order to conserve them. Steps are urgently needed to reduce noise, visual and traffic pollution and to address litter, waste and recycling issues, which are concerns across the area.

The HP16 landscape includes a sizeable area of agricultural pasturage and woodland. There is still a mix of arable and livestock farming but 'equiculture' has been a notable development in recent years and is thriving. Like most Chilterns woods, those in our area currently present little of real economic value in themselves. They are, however, of scientific and historical interest as well being important as ecological environments and for recreational use. There is at least one area of ancient woodland of special scientific importance in Angling Spring Wood, which includes several rare examples of flora and fauna. Numerous discoveries of great antiquity have been made locally, including Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman finds in hamlets such as Potter Row, Hyde End and Mobwell, plus nineteenth century brickworks in Prestwood. Landscape features include mediaeval enclosures, a moat and farmstead at Bury Farm, mediaeval fish pits in the grounds of Missenden Abbey Park and ancient earthworks in South Heath.

Several of our settlements incorporate significant open spaces, such as the Buryfield in Great Missenden, Prestwood Common and Ballinger Common. At present these tend to be maintained as playing fields although they are used for more general forms of recreation. A green infrastructure plan is needed to identify all local open spaces and to determine the most effective ways to manage them.

Key points include:

- The historic character of Great Missenden High Street is recognised as a key asset. Steps are urgently needed to reduce noise, visual and traffic pollution.
- We should work with local farmers and landowners to protect, conserve and enhance our natural and historic environment whilst supporting sustainable agriculture.
- There is concern about inappropriate and excessive development. We should work to create Village Design Statements to ensure that the characters of our settlements are maintained and that new buildings fit in and use good design and local, sustainable materials.
- Local residents, as well as visitors, enjoy being able to get out into the countryside. We should provide better information about and access to local and long distance walks and cycle routes. We need to build on Prestwood Nature's work in restoring neglected areas and maintaining the footpaths network.
- Litter, waste and recycling are concerns across the Parish.
- We should provide better information about our historical buildings and features to enable people to appreciate and conserve them.



The natural and built environment: Angling Spring Wood; River Misbourne; Great Missenden's historic High Street; The Lee Old Church

2.2 Community

Responses to our surveys recognised that ours is a pleasant place in which to live. The key concerns that emerged were the provision of housing, perceived crime rates and access to sport and leisure facilities.

- The area is mainly dormitory and relatively affluent, which means that those on average incomes face particular problems. There is a lack of affordable housing for those on lower incomes or for first-time buyers. The high demand for one and two bedroom properties exacerbated the problem until the housing market downturn. Practical steps to address the lack of affordable housing are urgently required as part of a Village Design Statement.
- The fear of crime is high although the area has a low crime rate and is safer than average. Noisy incidents late at night cause particular annoyance. The police are seen as unresponsive to complaints about antisocial behaviour. A more visible Police Community Support Officer presence, recently implemented, provides some reassurance.
- There is a relatively large number of children and young people, especially in Prestwood. The lack of leisure facilities and activities for them causes concern, as does the perceived scant provision for the elderly, who constitute a growing proportion of the population. Local amenities, such as village halls, are well used. An audit of provision is needed to identify where additional resources are required.
- Prestwood is a significant centre of population – among the largest villages in the UK - but lacks a real centre for community focus.
- The lack of leisure facilities, particularly for teenagers, causes concern.
- There are numerous local groups and societies across our area but communication between them is perceived as an issue.



Amenities: schools; leisure facilities; local groups and societies; village centres

Travel alternatives



2.3 Traffic & Transport

There were many comments about the high volume and speed of traffic using the High Streets in Great Missenden and Prestwood, on the A413 and on minor roads. Heavy goods vehicles often pass through the area to and from High Wycombe, using inappropriate routes. Through-traffic turns some residential roads into rat-runs. Residents and businesses praised the service provided by Chiltern Rail. There was concern about bus services and the ability to get to High Wycombe Hospital and Stoke Mandeville Hospital, along with the parking provided at those hospitals. Extended transport facilities for those without cars, particularly in outlying villages, should be provided. As has been noted earlier in this report, there is now a new bus service and that helps with the issue of reaching Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

- The recommendations in the report to the County Council on the A4128 Great Missenden to High Wycombe should be, and in part have been, implemented.
- Proposed speed limits throughout the area should be implemented. The 20mph limit in Great Missenden High Street should be enforced and a 7.5t weight restriction should be introduced.
- Traffic calming features in Great Missenden High Street and the lack of street lighting in Prestwood should be reviewed.
- Car parking provision and restrictions should be reviewed following the introduction of the Civil Enforcement Area (formerly called the Special Parking Area) and parking charges on Buryfield.
- The provision of a roundabout or traffic lights on the A413 at the Chiltern Hospital might be considered a priority, to add to the reduction of the speed limit on the A413 to 50mph.
- Improved standards of maintenance of highways and pavements are needed.
- A transport plan should be drawn up to tackle these problems.



Small High Street businesses



Local postal services



Social enterprise

2.4 Economy

There are as many as 500 businesses located in the HP16 area. Many of these are in the service sector, the majority being small businesses or self-employed people. In terms of employment and growth the economy of the area has been static. Since neighbouring growth areas are actively seeking to attract businesses, this is a potential threat. There is a perceived need to revive the Chamber of Commerce or an equivalent representative body, possibly community-wide but certainly for the commercial centres of Prestwood and Great Missenden. The current economic downturn will have an as yet unknown effect on local businesses and the domicile workforce.

- The demise of useful shops was listed in the top three 'dislikes' in our survey. The area needs more quality food shops, specialist retailers, cafés and tea-rooms. As has been noted, new retail businesses have opened since our surveys were conducted.
- Particular value was placed on amenities such as Post Offices, banks, pubs and restaurants. It has been, and will be, necessary to support them and to campaign to retain them.
- Great Missenden High Street's aesthetic appeal was widely acknowledged, but the number of empty shops and the impact of traffic and signage were deplored. Economic regeneration of our High Streets is seen as vital, which will be a major challenge in a recession.
- The area's position at the heart of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, its rich, historic environment and the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre make it attractive to visitors as well as a desirable place to live and work. We should involve the community as a whole in a plan to make the most of these assets for the benefit of business owners, visitors and residents alike.
- The potential for business networking is not being fully exploited and should be further investigated.

2.5 Communication

Communication of news, events and information throughout the area has been a weakness. The Link, published by the Parish Council and delivered to all homes, is appreciated but is produced only twice a year. There are a number of other excellent newsletters serving specific sections of the community. The local weekly newspapers do not cover this area adequately. We must aim to ensure that information and news are circulated through a wide variety of communication channels that are fully accessible, to promote more cohesive communities for Prestwood, Great Missenden and the surrounding villages. To this end we have created The Source, a full-colour, tabloid newspaper specific to HP16 and produced by volunteers five times per year through a community Social Enterprise, HP16 CIC (see www.hp16.org.uk).

3 The vision and plan for action

As we have identified, significant challenges face our area: the majority of us appreciate the relatively unspoilt environment hereabouts – whether we live or work here or just visit occasionally – but it would be all too easy for us to lose this environment if we fail to safeguard it. Local shops and services are potentially under threat from economic conditions and changing consumer buying patterns. Yet if all local people used local businesses they would waste less time and money on travel. This could even encourage others to own and operate businesses here. Three quarters of local people travel to work by car and most of them go to the shops the same way, compounding our traffic and parking issues.

We have produced a set of strategies and projects, based on our consultation responses and research, which we feel could make a real difference to our neighbourhood in the future. This process has the support of Great Missenden Parish Council and should form part of the future objectives for the District Council and Buckinghamshire County Council in terms of their approach to this area. These plans will not be delivered directly by the Councils. If they are to be realised, they will need support and input from community organisations and from people who live and work here.

Although the proposals focus on the broad issues of transport, the environment, the local economy, the community and communication, they are based on real feedback from local people. They are, therefore, specific to this area and are designed to be a starting point rather than definitive solutions to the challenges that face our communities in the future.

Our vision is to address these challenges realistically and positively, harnessing the strengths that are inherent in local people and organisations while appreciating and attempting to reconcile evident issues and weaknesses. Our ultimate aim is to create a sense of community and a sense of place that will enable and support the future stability and prosperity of our neighbourhood for everyone who has a stake in it.

3.1 Strategic actions



Set up an environment forum

The countryside around the HP16 communities was identified as our best asset, so organisations with an interest in the local environment will be contacted early in 2009 and invited to meet to discuss collaboration. Successful projects are already being undertaken by Prestwood Nature and many other organisations, so this will be an opportunity to augment those efforts and to address our litter and recycling issues.



Prepare a Village Design Statement

The different parts of our area have diverse regeneration and development issues so a Design Statement, which sets out clear and simple guidance for the design of all development in a village, would focus on the characters of our constituent communities. The Revitalisation Group (GMPRG) will be looking to set up a project team to kick-start this project with a focus on restoring our High Streets and minimising the impact of future development on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in which we live and work.



Develop a traffic management plan

Many comments have been made about traffic calming measures in Great Missenden, traffic speed in Prestwood and the neighbouring villages, and car parking provision across the area. Council budgets are notoriously slim but there's no barrier to the community developing its own work-arounds to traffic and parking problems, as well as proposing revisions and updates to signage and other street furniture. There's no quick fix for any of our traffic problems but dialogue with the County Council has begun and will continue. Solving these problems could encourage businesses to return to our High Streets.



Create a community transport plan

While accepting the role of private cars in modern life, one way to reduce traffic and parking problems would be to use our cars less. This would require more alternatives and better travel planning for work and school journeys, trips to hospital and so on. The Parish Council has the scope to introduce a demand-responsive community transport service if the need exists, but an initial project should involve determining what community and public transport services are already available before considering what else might be required.



Set up a youth forum

We have a huge number of young people locally but what do they want for the future? There are clubs and societies that they might use but is this really what they need? Churches Together will be looking into the potential for this forum and will be inviting community groups, residents and particularly young people to get involved.



New community facilities in Prestwood

The greatest proportion of HP16 residents lives in Prestwood, one of the largest villages in Britain, but does the village have everything that its residents need? Prestwood's residents and community groups will be invited to consider whether new or updated community facilities are required. This could include looking at venues for clubs, societies and community events. There are also the expected changes in local healthcare services to consider, which will need to be followed and their impact understood.



Build a business network

Our research placed the demise of local shops and services high on the list of dislikes so the idea of getting businesses to work together to develop an 'HP16 brand' is a good starting point for reversing the trend. The HP16 Business Network was trialled in 2007. It was well received so a follow-up event took place at Missenden Abbey in September 2008 and many local business people attended. Local traders in Great Missenden and Prestwood are also becoming involved in other initiatives including community events.



Create information and visitor strategies

What do our communities have to offer? There has typically been nowhere for residents and visitors to find out what is available and what is happening here. The introduction of The Source newspaper, which was a CV4HP16 idea, and the development of a directory and visitor guide (see projects in the appendices to this document) will help greatly. Defining the current 'HP16 offering' will be a necessary element of this strategy.

3.2 Project proposals

The above strategic proposals directly reflect the feedback to CV4HP16 and so should offer a sound platform for addressing some of the future issues facing our communities. But many other ideas emerged from our research, giving rise to a range of additional project suggestions that link to the strategic plans as follows:

- HP16 in Bloom initiatives;
- Support and enhance the Misbourne and other public open spaces;
- Restoration of conservation areas;
- Rights of Way development plan;
- Restoration of Great Missenden and Prestwood High Streets;
- Audit of heritage sites and buildings;
- Produce a local guide and directory of local businesses;
- Develop a database of local business premises;
- Establish a training and skills forum to link schools and employers.
- Develop a diary of community-wide events and plan new activities;
- Assess village hall facilities plus other spaces and buildings that may be available for community use.

The complete table of project proposals is included in the appendices to this document.

4 Next steps

GMPRG will make this document available to all local groups and organisations. It will aim to promote actions and projects arising from it, leading specific projects. It will encourage others to lead elements of strategy and project delivery as appropriate. Since the primary role of GMPRG is to act as a forum and project facilitator, the involvement of the wider community in these projects will be fundamental to their success. Comments and feedback on this document and its contents are welcome and can be sent to GMPRG by email to chairman@gmprg.org.uk.

5 Appendices

The following appendices are provided as an addendum to this document.

- Strategy & project table
- Worksheets
- Questionnaires
- Questionnaire and survey responses
- Interim project leaflets
- Published articles from The Source
- HP16 Business Network events
- Map and Census data